

## **THE PREVIOUS REFERENCE MARKER IN HAUSA: R.C. ABRAHAM'S INSIGHTS AND NEW ANALYSES\***

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### *1. Introduction*

Hausa has a definite determiner marked by a suffix ɓn/ɓɓ at the end of nominals. As is generally the case with deictic elements, the exact semantic/pragmatic characterisation of Hausa's determiner is hard to pin down (see Jaggar 1983: 389ff.; 1985: 144ff.); but it roughly indicates that the item to which it is attached has been previously referred to or is implied from the discourse context. The best source of examples illustrating its range of use is still the dictionary entry by the always remarkable R.C. Abraham (1962: 692). A detailed analytical study of the Hausa determiner system, including valuable dialectal information, is provided by Gouffé (1971). Among Hausaists, the definite determiner is now commonly termed the 'Previous Reference Marker' [PRM], the designation that I will use here. For convenience, I shall simply gloss it in translations as 'the'. The form of the marker is ɓɓ with feminine singular nouns ending in the vowel /a/, and ɓn with all other words, e.g.:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) taagàɓ 'the window' < taagàa (n.f.); geemùn 'the beard' < geemùu (n.m.); màcèn 'the woman' < màcè (n.f.); cookulàn 'the spoons' < cookulàa (n.pl.)<sup>2</sup>

The inherent tone of the determiner is Lo. When added to a word that ends in a Lo tone, as in the examples in (1), the tone of the PRM doesn't appear overtly on the surface. When added to a word ending in a Hi tone, on the other hand, the Lo is attached to the preceding tone to produce a Fall, e.g.:

- (2) wàndôn 'the trousers' < wàndoo; kàazàɓ 'the hen' < kàazaa

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<sup>1</sup> The symbol /ɓ/ represents the Hausa rolled R; the flap R is indicated by the unmarked /ɾ/. In the examples, low tone is indicated by a grave accent /à/, falling tone by a circumflex /â/, and high tone is unmarked. With long vowels, indicated by double letters, tone is marked on the first vowel only.

<sup>2</sup> In closed syllables, such as occur when the PRM is added, long vowels are automatically shortened in accordance with surface constraints against overheavy syllables (Newman 1972).

The PRM presents two general problems that need to be addressed, one analytical/synchronic, the other etymological/historical.

## 2. *The analytical/synchronic problem*

Hausa has a genitive linker [L], which is segmentally identical to the PRM, i.e. it is -n or -ɾ as determined by the same conditions described above, e.g.:

- (3) taagà-ɾ mootàa ‘the window of the car’; geemù-n-sà ‘his beard’;  
 cookulà-n kuukù ‘the cook’s spoons’

Unlike the PRM, which has inherent Lo tone, the bound form of the L is toneless:<sup>3</sup>

- (4) wàndo-n Muusaa ‘Musa’s trousers’; kàaza-ɾ kàakaataa ‘my grandmother’s hen’

Because of the differences in their meaning and function, and because of the tonal distinction which shows up overtly with final Hi tone words, the PRM and the L are seldom confused with one another, in spite of their segmental identity. There are, however, exceptions to this statement, the most notable being constructions with a demonstrative.

2.1. Hausa demonstratives constitute a four-term system containing two oppositions: (a) NAN vs. CAN and (b) Hi tone vs. non-Hi (= Falling or Lo). Consider the following examples:

- (5) shaahòn nân ‘this (near) hawk’, àkùn nân ‘this (near) parrot’; shaahòn nan ‘this hawk (in question)’, àkùn nan ‘this parrot (in question)’; shaahòn càn ‘that hawk (there, visible)’, àkùn càn ‘that parrot (there, visible)’; shaahòn can ‘that hawk (there, distant or in question)’, àkùn can ‘that parrot (there, distant or in question)’<sup>4</sup>

The form of the demonstratives used with feminine nouns is exactly the same as that used with masculine nouns; the only difference is that the noun appears with -ɾ instead of -n,<sup>5</sup> e.g.:

<sup>3</sup> The Linker, but not the PRM, has corresponding long forms na(a)/ta(a) with inherent Hi tone. These allomorphs, which are used in specific morphosyntactic contexts, need not concern us in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> The locative adverbs reflect the same four-term system except that the Lo tone variants do not appear, e.g. yanàa nân/nan/cân/can ‘it is here/here (existent)/there/yonder’.

<sup>5</sup> Actually, the -ɾ assimilates to the initial /n/ of nan so that the grammatically required distinction between the masculine -n and the feminine -ɾ, which is preserved in current Hausa orthography, is lost on the surface, i.e. /kàazaɾ nân/ = [kàazannân]. This is correctly understood to be due to a phonological process rather than representing a grammatical irregularity.

- (6) buutâr nân 'this kettle', kàazaâr nân 'this hen', bukkâr cân 'that hut', rùmfââr cân 'that (distant) shed'

The question that needs to be asked is: what is the -n/-r marker that occurs between the noun and the demonstrative?

2.1.1. Kraft & Kirk-Greene (1973: 51) identify it as the PRM. This is undoubtedly on the basis of the forms with a Falling tone followed by the Hi tone demonstrative, e.g.:

- (7) àkûn nan 'this (known) parrot', cf. àkûn 'the parrot' vs. àkun maalàm 'the teacher's parrot'; kàazââr cân 'that (distant) hen', cf. kàazââr 'the hen'

They offer no explanation, however, why the presumed PRM added to a Hi tone noun sometimes appears with Hi tone rather than the expected Falling tone, e.g.:

- (8) àkun (not \*àkûn) nân 'this parrot'; kàazaâr (not \*kàazââr) cân 'that hen'

Jaggar (1985: 144ff.), who seems to accept the PRM analysis, similarly ignores the problem of the missing Falling tones.

2.1.2. Cowan & Schuh (1976: 101, 298-99), Parsons (1963: 207), and Tuller (1986: 37) assert that the demonstrative is attached to the noun by means of the Linker. Their analysis works for the toneless -n/-r forms, but, being the converse of the PRM analysis, fails to account for the cases such as in (7) where the noun displays a falling tone. Gouffé (1971: 176-177), who also identifies the -n/-r before the demonstratives as the Linker, explicitly acknowledges that the tones are problematical, but suggests that the variations are due to word internal morphotonemic factors which do not nullify the basic grammatical identification.

2.1.3. Galadanci (1969: 60-61) also recognises the tonal problem. He concludes, however, that the tonal evidence is too significant to be ignored and, as a result, argues that the -n/-r before the demonstrative *cannot* be identified with the Linker, which is always toneless, *nor* with the PRM, which always has Lo tone. For him, it is a third, distinct grammatical element whose use is limited to demonstrative constructions.

2.2. The correct answer, I would suggest, is that the -n/-r is indeed the Linker, and that it serves to connect the noun to the following adverbial locative to form a cliticised demonstrative. In other words, an example such as kàaza-r-cân 'that hen' derives from a straightforward phrase 'hen-of-there'. But if this is so, why do final Hi tone nouns, such as in (7), become

Falling and thus have the appearance of a noun with a PRM ? It turns out that Abraham (1941: 80-83) already had the correct explanation figured out some fifty years ago.<sup>6</sup> Rephrased in present-day terms, his analysis is the following. The *nan/can* forms meaning 'this/that' have inherent HL tone just like the homophonous locatives 'here/there'. When added to a word ending in Lo tone (to which the toneless Linker is attached), the HL surfaces on the demonstrative as a Fall, e.g.:

- (9)
- |         |     |    |   |         |     |   |
|---------|-----|----|---|---------|-----|---|
| H       | L   | HL |   | H       | L   | HL                                      |
|         |     |    |   |         |     | ∨                                       |
| geemu-n | nan |    | → | geemù-n | nân | 'this beard', cf. yanàa nân 'it's here' |
- 
- |         |     |    |   |         |     |   |
|---------|-----|----|---|---------|-----|---|
| H       | L   | HL |   | H       | L   | HL  |
|         |     |    |   |         |     | ∨   |
| taaga-ř | cân |    | → | taagà-ř | cân | 'that window', cf. tanàa cân 'it's there' |

When added to a word ending in Hi tone, on the other hand, the Hi component of the HL demonstrative is tonally absorbed into the preceding tone. The result is that the demonstrative does not surface with a Falling tone; rather its underlying HL pattern is manifested on the final two syllables composed of the noun plus the demonstrative, e.g.:

- (10) L H HL                 L H L  
aku-n can → àku-n -càn ‘that parrot’  
L H HL                 L H L  
kaaza-ř nan → kàaza-ř-nàn ‘this hen’

The same tonal processes also account for the shape of the 'long-form' demonstratives made up of *wa-* + the Linker + *nan/can*, e.g.:

- (11) H HL H L  
wa-n-nan → wannàn 'this (one)'  
H HL H L  
wa-ř-can → waccàn 'that (one)'

<sup>6</sup> The same material is found in the more easily accessible 1959 edition of the work (Abraham 1959: 53-55).

By contrast, the homophonous adverbials 'here/there', which do not cliticise to the preceding word, retain the HL falling tone regardless of the preceding tone, e.g.:

- (12) yaa zoo nân (not \*yaa zoo nân) 'he came here'  
 zaa tà tàfi cân (not \*zaa tà tàfi cân) 'she will go there'

For Abraham, the other pair of nan/can forms meaning 'this (existent)/that there (distant)' has underlying LH tone. Given the fact that Hausa does not have surface rising tones – the corresponding adverbs nan/can 'here (existent/visible)/there (distant)' have Hi tone – this was an extremely perceptive insight by Abraham at the time. When added to words ending in a Lo tone, tonal absorption takes place, the result being Lo-Hi on the final two syllables. The pattern thus mirrors that illustrated in (10) for the HL demonstrative, e.g.:<sup>7</sup>

- (13) H L LH                      H L H  
    | | |  
 geemu-n nan → geemù-n-nan 'this (known) beard'  
 H L LH                      H L H  
    | | |  
 taaga-ř can → taagà-ř-can 'that there window'

If the tonal situation in Hausa were entirely symmetrical, an underlying LH demonstrative added to a word ending in a Hi tone would be expected to attach to the demonstrative to produce a rising tone. However, since Hausa does not have rising tones, the initial Lo of the LH demonstrative is attached to the preceding syllable (producing a surface Falling tone), in order to preserve the underlying LH pattern, e.g.:

- (14) L H LH                      L H LH  
    | | / |  
 aku-n can → àkû-n-can 'that there parrot'  
 L H LH                      L H LH  
    | | / |  
 kaaza-ř nan → kàazâ-ř-nan 'this (known) hen'

With the long form demonstratives, the initial Lo of the LH demonstrative either attaches to the preceding syllable or fully occupies it and overrides the initial Hi tone, e.g.:

<sup>7</sup> An alternative analysis would be to say that the LH remains as is on the demonstrative and that it surfaces as Hi due to the operation of a late LH to Hi simplification rule. My intuition is that the analysis presented here is the right one; but both analyses equally generate the correct surface forms.

- (15) H      LH                      H LH      =      H LH  
   / |                      / |  
 wa-n -can      →      wāncan              wāncan 'that (one) there'  
   / |                      / |  
 H      LH                      H LH      =      H LH  
 wa-ŋ -nan      →      wānnan              wānnan 'this (one) known'

One should mention that the beauty in Abraham's analysis is that it not only accounts in a natural way for the variation in the form of the noun preceding the demonstrative, but it also accounts for the Lo vs. Falling allomorphs of the demonstratives themselves.

2.3. The ability of natural, phonologically shallow tone rules to create morphological confusion can be illustrated with the use of the PRM in relative clause constructions. In Hausa, relative clauses follow the head noun and are introduced by a particle *dà*. The head noun usually, but not invariably, occurs with the PRM, which, when added to a final Hi tone noun produces a Fall,<sup>8</sup> e.g.:

- (16) àkû-n dà na sàyaa 'the parrot that I bought'  
       kàazâ-ŋ dà ta kaamàa 'the hen that she caught'

In certain Hausa dialects, for example that of the Maradi area (and probably considerably beyond), the tonal sequence Falling + Lo in relative clauses typically simplifies to Hi Lo (cf. Gouffé 1981: 28; PN notes),<sup>9</sup> e.g.:

- (17) àku-n dà (< àkû-n dà ) na sàyaa 'the parrot that I bought'  
       kàaza-d dà (< kàazâ-t dà ) ta kaamàa 'the hen that she caught'

The result is that the PRM in the relative construction looks just like the Linker. Not only is the linguist likely to be misled by this, but over time native speakers themselves can be expected to reinterpret the erstwhile PRM as a Linker and thereby reformulate their grammars.

### 3. *The etymological/historical problem*

Viewed historically, where does the PRM come from?

3.1. Hypothesis 1. Abraham (1941: 82) views the PRM as a reduced form of the Noun-Linker LH-demonstrative construction with the demonstrative

<sup>8</sup> The statement by McIntyre & Meyer-Bahlburg (1991: ix) that final Hi tone nouns plus -n/-ŋ always remain Hi before the relative marker *dà* is incorrect.

<sup>9</sup> With the long relative forms *wāndà* 'he who' *wāddà* 'she who' (< wa + PRM + *dà*), the tonal simplification to *wandà*/*waddà* is also becoming the norm in Standard Kano Hausa.

omitted. In this analysis, the Lo tone on the PRM is accidental, so to speak, and derivative, e.g.:

- (18) shaahò-n 'the hawk' < \*shaahò-n nan/can 'this/that known hawk'  
 kàazâ-ř 'the hen' < \*kàazâ-ř nan/can 'this/that known hen'  
 maatâ-n 'the women' < \*maatâ-n nan/can 'these/those known women'

Abraham implies that the PRM could equally represent a reduction from L + nan or from L + can, the semantic difference between the two forms being neutralized. Jaggar (1983: 176, n. 13), who supports the idea of the PRM having come from a reduced demonstrative construction, asserts on universal linguistic grounds that the source construction most likely would have contained the distal demonstrative, i.e. the PRM would have come from /<sup>h</sup>n can/ and /<sup>h</sup>ř can/. Jaggar does not, however, explicitly equate the <sup>h</sup>n/<sup>h</sup>ř marker with the Linker; rather he calls it a 'gender/number-sensitive suffix' (p. 145).

3.2. Hypothesis 2. Schuh (1983) proposes that <sup>h</sup>n and <sup>h</sup>ř derive directly from Lo tone deictic markers, \*nà and \*tà respectively. (The change of t > ř in syllable final position in Hausa is regular.) The Lo tone associated with the PRM represents the preservation of an original tone after the loss of its host vowel. Etymologically, \*nà and \*tà are presumed to be cognate with the Hi tone Linker na/ta (= toneless -n/-ř), but the relationship is historically much deeper than that suggested by Abraham's derivation.<sup>10</sup> In other words, for Schuh \*NA/\*TA represents a single pair of deictics, whose different functions, namely genitive linker vs. previous reference marker, are signalled by tonal distinctions.

4. The problem with Abraham's derivation is that it treats the Noun+L+nan/can as historically basic and the Noun+PRM as derivative, whereas there is good reason to believe that this is the reverse of the actual case. The older demonstrative in Hausa was probably a form related to the -ga (with underlying LH tone!) that is used in Western dialects, e.g. zoobè-n-ga 'this ring', màatâg-ga 'this wife'. The present-day Standard Hausa demonstratives that employ the locative adverbs nan/can are almost certainly more recent paraphrastic constructions which replaced the earlier demonstrative forms. Schuh's analysis thus strikes me as being on the right track; but it too is wanting in some respects. I would like, therefore, to propose two additional hypotheses which I deem worthy of consideration and evaluation.

<sup>10</sup> Abraham sees the PRM as deriving from the Linker by surface ellipsis. Schuh, on the other hand, views the derivation as having gone in the opposite direction, i.e. he considers the Linker to be a secondary development by semantic bleaching and grammatical reinterpretation from an original determiner/deictic element.

**4.1. Hypothesis 3.** The idea that ̀n and ̀ř should come from forms originally containing an underlying vowel with Lo tone seems reasonable. There is nothing, however, which forces us to accept the idea that the original vowel had to have been /a/. Schuh specifies the PRM forms as \*nà/\*tà because he conceives of them as being etymologically related to the na/ta Linker; but in so doing he minimises the tonal differences. I would suggest that a better analysis exists which provides a natural explanation for the distinct Lo tone on the PRM. This alternative is that ̀n and ̀ř derive *not* from the same source as the Linker, but rather from distinct definite determiners of the form \*nì and \*tə,<sup>11</sup> e.g.:

(19) bàkâ-n ‘the bow’ < \*bàkaa-nì; kàazâ-ř ‘the hen’ < \*kàazaa-tə

The postulated \*nì/\*tə determiners relate to widespread third person singular clitic pronouns in Chadic. The use of these forms as determiners can be illustrated by examples from Kanakuru (Newman 1974: 86), where their occurrence is lexically restricted, and from Sura (Jungraithmayr 1963: 24), where only the nì form is used since the language does not preserve grammatical gender:

- (20) a. máamí-nì ‘the man’ (= máamí-ì) [Kanakuru]  
           támnó-rò (where rò < \*tò) ‘the woman’ (= támnó-ì) [Kanakuru]  
       b. gùrùm-nì ‘the man’, mât-nì ‘the woman’, lú-nì ‘the house’ [Sura]

One should note that in neither Kanakuru nor Sura is a form such as nì used as a Linker.

**4.2. Hypothesis 4.** The historical derivations of ̀n/̀ř from \*nà/\*tà or from \*nì/\*tə are similar in that they presume that ̀n and ̀ř are monomorphemic and that the Lo tone is or was an integral part of the morpheme. Another possibility, which as far as I am aware has never been suggested, is that ̀n and ̀ř represent the fusion of a toneless Linker -n/-ř plus a floating Lo tone /ˊ/, where the floating tone is the true PRM determiner. In the same way that gida-n nân ‘this home’ and kàaza-ř càn ‘that hen’ are composed of Noun-Linker + demonstrative, so gidâ-n ‘the home’ and kàazâ-ř ‘the hen’ would be composed of Noun-Linker + PRM, where the PRM is /ˊ/. An interesting consequence of this analysis is that the PRM, like the demonstratives, turns out to be unmarked for gender. Whereas Hausaists have come to view the PRM as one of the more important exponents of gender – and synchronically one undoubtedly would want to continue to think of it in

<sup>11</sup> The schwa utilised in the feminine form is a rough approximation. Some West Chadic languages (especially in the Bole group) have /to/, some have /ti/, and some have /ta/. The use of the abstract form \*tə is intended here simply to keep this item notationally distinct from the linker /ta/ which occurs in the na/ta pair.



those terms – it is a very common, albeit not ubiquitous, characteristic of Chadic languages for the determiner (= definite article = referential marker) to be invariant in form and not gender-sensitive. The proposal, then, is that the PRM was not attached directly to the noun, but rather was connected to it by means of a Linker. The following illustrates the presumed \*Noun-L + PRM pattern:

- (21) \*ràagoo-n + ` → ràagôn 'the ram'; \*kàazaa-ĩ + ` → kàazâ-ĩ  
'the hen'

If the above analysis is correct, the question naturally follows, where did the floating tone come from? The most likely answer is that it is a vestige of the Lo tone suffixal determiner \*-ì, which Schuh (1983: 58) reconstructs as a Chadic definite article on the basis of its wide distribution in the family. Consider the following examples from Kanakuru (Newman 1974: 86) and Guruntum (Jaggar 1988: 177):

- (22) a. tóró-ì 'the farm', máawò-ì 'the stranger', gám-ìì 'the ram'  
[Kanakuru]  
b. bùushi-(y)ì 'the ashes', yìngsù-(w)ì 'the road', gèru-(w)ì 'the boy' [Guruntum]

Actually, we do not have to turn to other Chadic languages to illustrate the -ì form of the determiner. This also exists in Hausa itself, although not in the standard dialect to which we often restrict our attention. In Maradi and other north-west dialects, -ì instead of -ĩ is the regular form of the PRM with feminine nouns (Zaria 1982; PN notes), e.g.:

- (23) kàazâ-ì 'the hen', abdùgâ-ì 'the cotton', cf. àkû-n 'the parrot'

Interestingly, the dialects with -ì as the feminine PRM do not use this form as a Linker, thereby supporting the view that the Linker and the PRM are distinct morphemes. The feminine Linker in these dialects is -C (= gemination of the following consonant), which is simply a phonological manifestation of the same -t which underlies the Standard Hausa -ĩ, e.g.:

- (24) kàaza-t-tà 'her hen', not \*kàaza-i-tà; abdùga-r riimii 'kapok'  
( 'cotton of silk-cotton tree'), not \*abdùga-i riimii

When I first became aware of this final -ì form, I casually assumed that it represented a phonological manifestation of the feminine PRM marker like the other dialectal variants -t/-ĩ/-l etc. I now consider it much more likely that it represents a direct reflex of the Chadic \*-ì suffix. Nevertheless, even if this is correct, one could argue that the presence of this morpheme in Hausa constitutes evidence *against*, rather than for, the interpretation of the PRM as having come historically from a Linker + -ì. The reason is that in Maradi dialect, as in Kanakuru and Guruntum, -ì is attached directly to the preceding

noun without an intervening Linker. While some Chadic languages, e.g. Tera, do connect the suffixal determiner to the noun by means of a Linker, this does not seem to be the West Chadic pattern. This doesn't mean that the analysis of *bākān* 'the bow', e.g. as having come from three morphemes *bàkaa* 'bow' + *-n* 'Linker' + *`* (< \**-i*) 'determiner' is ruled out, but it certainly weakens the case.

5. I have outlined four historical hypotheses regarding the etymology of the PRM in Hausa. In my opinion, none of the hypotheses is so unreasonable as to be rejected outright. Nevertheless, if I had to select one that I considered the most promising, I personally would choose Hypothesis 3, namely that the present day *ɓn/ɓɓ* suffixes go back to distinct determiners of the form \**nì* and \**tə̀*. The purpose of this communication, however, is not to argue for one analysis over another, but rather to clarify issues regarding the synchronic and etymological relationship between the Linker and the PRM, and to present new historical interpretations that heretofore had not been entertained.

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